Summary of the Thesis

In the current economic, social and environmental climate, defined by a visibly increasing and evolving concern for sustainability, emerging trends, and changing production and consumption models, the circular economy represents a strategic alternative for companies oriented towards systems based on innovation, development and appropriate promotion. More specifically, as this direction marks a global transformation both in the way products are sold and communicated and in the way they are perceived and purchased, marketing no longer holds only the role of supporting the commercialisation process. Instead, it becomes the central mechanism through which brands connect sustainability, at both conceptual and practical levels, with the value offered and with responsible consumer behaviour.

The thesis, *The Role of the Circular Economy in Marketing Strategy: A Perspective on Consumer Behaviour and Companies' Promotional Practices*, representative of the scientific research programme, defines an integrated approach by correlating the theoretical foundation with the empirical analysis, with a focus on a marketing vision intersected with the implications of the circular economy. Through the fulfilment of its objectives, the thesis aims to design an effective marketing strategy capable of sustainably supporting the current and future promotion of the circular economy.

From the perspective of the specialised literature, the circular economy is frequently approached from an economic and technological standpoint. However, from the perspective of marketing, it is closely connected to the role of communication strategies in influencing consumer behaviour, an aspect that remains less explored from a scientific point of view at present. Thus, the present research aims to analyse how the marketing strategies used by companies oriented towards sustainability are adapted to the requirements of the circular economy, as well as the impact that these strategies ultimately have on responsible consumer behaviour. In this context, in order to capture both the perspective of companies in terms of development and promotion and the impact on consumer reactions, the thesis adopts a mixed methodological approach.

The research framework reflects the defining role of the circular economy in shaping marketing strategies, in adapting business models to the requirements of sustainability, and in modelling responsible consumer behaviour. The thesis is based on a mixed approach with exploratory, empirical and conceptual perspectives, integrating the theoretical analysis of the circular economy and marketing strategy with qualitative research on the way in which the principles of the circular economy influence the development of sustainability-oriented marketing strategies, as well as with

quantitative research on the level of education, knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and consumption behaviours associated with sustainable products within the current circular economy.

In this regard, the theoretical foundation, together with the valorisation of the empirical results, facilitated the development of a conceptual model designed for the elaboration of marketing strategy in the context of the circular economy. The results obtained indicate a gap between companies' initiatives regarding the integration, communication and promotion of principles corresponding to the circular economy and the way in which these actions are perceived in the market. The actual purchasing decision is influenced by the level of education and information, functional and aesthetic value, price and accessibility, transparency and trust, as well as by the quality component.

The central projection of the research is reflected in the directions and contributions that outline the need for effective correlation between companies' sustainable initiatives, the way these initiatives are integrated into marketing strategy, and how they are perceived by a consumer profile educated in sustainability, attentive to product specifications and demanding in the evaluation process. Consequently, the proposed conceptual model provides an integrated and unitary framework for the continuous design and adaptation of marketing strategies to the contemporary landscape progressively shaped by the circular economy model. In general terms, the contribution to the topic is determined by the interconnected results of the research, which seek to identify and outline strategic marketing directions capable of supporting, in a feasible, applied and coherent manner, the promotion of the circular economy through the education of consumer behaviour. This contributes, on the one hand, to the theoretical development of the field and, on the other hand, to the applied foundation of business models oriented towards the circular economy and sustainable promotion.

The title of the doctoral thesis, *The Role of the Circular Economy in Marketing Strategy: A Perspective on Consumer Behaviour and Companies' Promotional Practices*, represents, through its conceptual wording and terminological construction, a complex analytical proposal that captures the essence of the thesis from both the consumer and company perspectives, taking into account the notions of circular economy and marketing strategy. Through these aspects, the research aims, by using modern and scientific methods, to provide a coherent perspective on a broad process defined by the circular economy and translated into the adaptation of marketing strategy to consumer reactions and behaviours, in line with current and future market trends.

The general aim of the research is to develop an appropriate conceptual framework for designing a marketing strategy with a sustainable component, adapted to the principles of the circular economy.

In order to achieve the main aim, the research pursues the following **specific objectives**:

1) To analyse, through the specialised literature, the theoretical framework of the circular economy, marketing strategy and sustainability, as well as the way in which these concepts are currently integrated into companies' promotional techniques, in relation to the analysis of responsible consumer behaviour;

2) To identify the main theoretical and practical approaches regarding marketing strategy translated into the context of the circular economy, with emphasis on adapting the marketing mix to market requirements and needs;

3) To analyse the marketing environment within the circular economy, highlighting the interaction between companies and consumers and its implications for sustainable marketing strategies and campaigns;

4) To investigate companies' perceptions regarding the adaptation of marketing strategy to the circular economy, through qualitative research;

5) To investigate consumer behaviour in relation to companies' sustainable marketing strategies, through quantitative research;

6) To identify the key elements that directly influence the effectiveness of sustainable marketing strategies within the circular economy, based on the results generated by the empirical research;

7) To develop and propose a conceptual model of a sustainability-oriented marketing strategy, applicable in the context of the circular economy.

The choice of the research topic is based both on a series of personal considerations, reflected in the interest and experience accumulated in the fields of marketing and communication, economics and sustainability, and on a series of scientific and professional considerations, represented by the relevance of the research topic and by the increasingly visible market concern for analysing the circular economy in relation to marketing strategy. The analysis and applicability of this approach have therefore led to the shaping of a research endeavour oriented towards understanding and detailing how current marketing strategies can support both the sustainability component and the influence of consumer behaviour within the circular economy.

The structure of the thesis is designed systematically, through the coherent and progressive organisation of chapters and subchapters with representative themes. This determines a conceptual sequencing of the final form of the research and reflects the theoretical and empirical approach based on the relationship between marketing strategy, circular economy and consumer behaviour. Conceived within a sequential logic, the architecture of the thesis is divided into three main parts, each characterised by a series of defining chapters.

The first part of the thesis, *Theoretical Approach to the Circular Economy and Marketing Strategy*, is devoted exclusively to the theoretical foundation of the research. This section analyses the concepts, terms and directions of the circular economy and marketing strategy, highlighting the relationships between them and placing, at their intersection, the term and function of marketing as the main element of contextualisation, analysis and evaluation of the approach under study. Thus, the delimitation of a theoretical framework for the circular economy and marketing strategy is relevant in this context, as it provides the conceptual and analytical basis that guides the research path, clarifies the key elements and explains the relationships between the main variables presented.

Structured around three main chapters, Part I focuses on the exploration of the circular economy, consumer behaviour and marketing strategy in a scientific and exploratory manner, aiming to clarify the dynamics between the concepts discussed in order to fulfil the established objectives.

The purpose of the theoretical framework is to provide a clear and logical structure for the perspective on consumer behaviour and companies' promotional practices, acting as a complex system that connects the established research objectives with the studies, research and analyses existing in the literature.

Among the main arguments supporting the existence of a theoretical framework for the thesis, with emphasis on the projected results, are the clarification of key concepts and definitions, the identification of research gaps regarding the interconnection between the circular economy and marketing strategy, the establishment of conceptual relationships between notions, the provision of a solid knowledge base for the research objectives and directions, the guidance of empirical research, and the positioning of the research within the existing literature.

The relevance of the theoretical section is therefore highlighted in the thesis through the presentation, selection and investigation of the specialised literature, using an exploratory research method both to clarify the terms circular economy and marketing strategy and to explore responsible consumer behaviour and the adaptation of marketing strategy to the circular economy ecosystem.

Therefore, Part I, defined by a theoretical approach to the circular economy and marketing strategy, represents an essential conceptual framework through the scientific and conceptual structure of the research. This part ensures terminological clarity, supports methodological rigour and connects the premises extracted from the specialised literature with the empirical analysis in the following part, ultimately providing access to a deeper understanding of how a marketing strategy can contribute to the implementation and promotion of circular economy principles.

Chapter 1, entitled *The Circular Economy*, represents an integration of the key elements of the circular economy in the form of a complex analysis, with the purpose of defining the theoretical foundations of the concept, highlighting the fundamental principles of the transition towards a circular economy and observing its implications for marketing.

The presence of this dedicated chapter is essential for the thesis topic, centred on the circular economy and marketing strategy, as it establishes the theoretical, environmental and strategic foundation necessary for designing the analysis of modern marketing approaches.

The basic structure of the chapter includes two related sections, namely a conceptualisation of the circular economy and sustainability within the circular economy. These are, in turn, defined by specific subchapters that emphasise the main notions in a scientifically descriptive and logically coherent manner in terms of flow and integration into the research.

The exploratory research directions therefore bring together a series of premises analysed from a marketing perspective, with emphasis both on the concept of circular economy and on the concept of sustainability. These terms are ultimately integrated in a coherent, harmonised and applied manner for the purposes of the research. Consequently, the general approach of the chapter is based on the conceptual positioning of the key terms in relation to sustainable perspectives observed through the lens of marketing strategy.

Chapter 2, entitled *The Impact of the Circular Economy on Consumer Behaviour*, includes a homogeneous exploratory analysis of the particularities related to the investigation and modelling of current consumer behaviour in the market. In a context marked by the transition from a linear economic model to a circular economy model, changes occur across the entire production–consumption relationship. Therefore, both the production, sales, promotion and distribution processes associated with business models and the perception, attitude, decision and motivation directions associated with purchasing behaviour are determined by integrated transformations with a responsible, relevant and differentiated contribution.

The presence of this distinct chapter is essential for the thesis topic, as it academically reflects the relationship between consumers and companies through the adoption of responsible behaviour within the circular economy. This behaviour is influenced by a series of political, economic, social, technological, legal and ecological factors, which marks the impact of the marketing environment on the formation of consumer behaviour as a strategic direction.

The structure of this chapter includes two main and representative sections, namely transformations of consumer behaviour in the context of the circular economy and the differentiation of consumer behaviour in the circular economy. These are, in turn, defined by specific and detailed subchapters that consolidate the context addressed in a successive manner.

In this sense, the first part follows the role of environmental factors in shaping consumer behaviour and the main evolutions and transformations determined by the circular economy, while the second part focuses on consumer segmentation, related profiles and the decision-making process, the analysis contributing to the foundation of the relationship between the circular economy and marketing strategy. Based on these considerations, the chapter represents a point of connection between the principles of circularity and marketing strategies, having the defining role of analysing the impact generated by the applicability of the circular economy.

Chapter 3, entitled *Marketing Strategy*, aims to analyse the second main concept of the thesis from a theoretical and applied perspective, adapted to the context of the circular economy. Starting from the understanding of classical literature, according to which traditional marketing strategy is shaped by an approach oriented towards customers and sales, the modern, digital and circular economy-oriented context requires a much broader approach. Thus, contemporary marketing strategy is shaped as a holistic system of values with interfunctional influences, aligning a company's value with the needs, desires and expectations of customer segments with continuously changing preferences, operating in a competitive, responsible and innovative environment. Chapter 3 therefore represents an approach to marketing strategy based on the vision of classical theorists, but with an emphasis on a customer-oriented mechanism, with implications in the digital field, moving from traditional marketing based on the 4Ps towards a personalised and sustainable system adapted to the context of the circular economy.

The presence of this distinct chapter is relevant for the thesis topic centred on the circular economy and marketing strategy, as it gradually reflects the transition from the contextual dimension of the circular economy towards the sustainable marketing environment and, implicitly, towards a marketing strategy adapted to a framework based on responsibility towards the environment, society and the economy, in line with the perspective on consumer behaviour and companies' promotional practices. The structure of the chapter includes two representative key sections, defined by a series of specific subchapters that consolidate the scientific context addressed.

The exploratory research directions in this segment of the thesis intersect with the defining components of the relationship between the circular economy and marketing strategy, as well as with the particularities of the two concepts carefully studied both individually and integratively. In order to consolidate the directions related to the adoption of sustainable behaviour in the market, this chapter reinforces the trajectory already analysed through the specialised literature, adding to the research the elements of sustainable marketing communication and education for sustainability, positioned within the research as key components of the topic.

The second part of the thesis, *Research on Marketing Strategy within the Circular Economy Model*, includes an empirical perspective, defined by the research context regarding marketing strategy within the circular economy model, and aims to design two empirical studies based on data collected and interpreted in accordance with the scientific context grounded in the specialised literature.

Starting from the theoretical foundations presented in the first part of the thesis and from the research gaps identified in the literature regarding the intersection of the circular economy and marketing strategy concepts, the current framework provides the necessary directions for developing the research topic in a manner supported by data and aligned with the premises studied. Thus, the two complementary approaches integrate the overall perspective on the role of the circular economy in marketing strategy, from the perspective of consumer behaviour and companies' promotional practices.

Structured around a single chapter, namely Chapter 4 — *Qualitative and Quantitative Research on Marketing Strategy within the Circular Economy Model* — and comprising three specific subchapters, namely qualitative research: the integration and promotion of a sustainable business model by companies; quantitative research: consumer perception and behaviour in choosing sustainable products; and comparative analysis and integration of qualitative and quantitative research results, Part II presents a complete scientific endeavour through the integration of key concepts into the current market context.

The aim of the empirical research framework is to explore the relationship between the circular economy and marketing strategy in the contemporary context, nuancing the implications of key factors such as sustainability, communication, education and promotion, in order to define an overall framework with perspectives on consumer behaviour and organisational vision.

The relevance of the empirical section is highlighted through the use of a mixed approach, which makes possible a broader understanding of the phenomenon under study. While the qualitative research, conducted among 35 companies and analysed through thematic analysis, provides depth, explanatory perspectives, interpretations and nuances from the organisational sphere, the quantitative research, conducted on a sample of 400 respondents and analysed through statistical processing, provides breadth, structure and the possibility of identifying consumption trends. In the construction of the two studies that constitute Chapter 4, a series of predominant stages were considered, supporting the scientific path of the research. Correlations were made with the specialised literature in relation to the collected data and the applied methodology, directly connected to the analysis of the recorded results and the interpretation of the data in the current context of marketing and the circular economy.

Chapter 4, entitled *Qualitative and Quantitative Research on Marketing Strategy within the Circular Economy Model*, represents a mixed integration of the applied context for the circular economy and marketing strategy, marked by the development of two scientific studies designed to support the theoretical framework through the contribution of studies relevant to the field under analysis and to the intersection of the factors examined, with impact in terms of future perspectives in the field of environmental, economic and social sustainability.

Moreover, the presence of this chapter is essential for the research topic, as it validates, based on the results obtained, the direction of the main subject in the current context defined by the specialised literature, outlining premises and future research directions.

Overall, Chapter 4 presents the two studies carried out in support of the topic from methodological, empirical and applied perspectives and aims to integrate the results into the study, in connection with the premises resulting from the exploration of the specialised literature in the field of marketing strategy and the circular economy. The qualitative research, addressed strictly to companies, is defined by the analysis of the perspective of the interviewed companies on the integration of the circular economy model into marketing strategy and by the identification of their promotional practices. By contrast, the quantitative research, addressed strictly to consumers, has as its main objective the investigation of consumers' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours in relation to sustainable products, services and marketing campaigns. The results obtained from these studies outline a clear direction in supporting the exploratory effort and provide empirical support for the development of the conceptual model proposed in the final part of the thesis.

The structure of the chapter includes three related subchapters that form the complete framework of the research through qualitative and quantitative research on marketing strategy within the circular economy model, as well as through the comparative analysis and integration of qualitative and quantitative research results.

The need for a dual perspective, both from the companies' point of view and from the consumers' point of view, justifies the existence of the two research models and derives from the plurivalence of the analysed topic. In this way, the idea is outlined that the relationship between the circular economy and marketing strategy requires a mixed approach in order to complete the overall vision of the research.

Through the systematic integration of qualitative and quantitative research, the empirical trajectory of the thesis is guided by the overall perspective interconnected with the role of the circular economy in marketing strategy. The purpose of the approach is to identify consumers' perceptions of sustainable products and to understand how companies communicate the principles of sustainability through the promotion of the circular economy in their current activity.

The third part of the thesis, *Proposal of a Conceptual Model for Establishing a Marketing Strategy*, marks the coherent transition from the theoretical foundation and empirical analysis of the relationship between marketing, the circular economy and sustainability towards the current framework for formulating an original contribution with a strategic, applied and integrated character.

Starting from the results obtained in the previous stages of the research, it is emphasised that the complex, organic and staged process of transition towards the circular economy cannot be fully supported through operational, technological or legislative actions alone. Rather, it requires an integrated approach through which marketing strategy has the role of facilitating the harmonious connection between company objectives, the principles of circularity and consumer expectations. Thus, the current landscape assumes that an effective sustainable marketing strategy aims, through its mechanisms, to increase the level of trust both in sustainable products and in the related communication, transforming impact specifications into valuable information for consumers and facilitating the transition from perception and intention to actual purchasing behaviour.

The need to develop a conceptual model derives from the multilateral nature of the process of integrating the circular economy into companies' marketing activities. The model is built on the exploration of the specialised literature related to the circular economy, consumer behaviour and marketing strategy, on the results of the qualitative and quantitative research, and on the relationships between the statistically tested variables. In relation to the key concepts, it is worth noting that, in practice, the adoption of sustainable initiatives does not automatically lead to favourable effects in the market. Therefore, these initiatives must be included in the business model, supported by appropriate organisational resources and capabilities, translated into elements of the marketing mix and marketing environment, and communicated to consumers in a transparent, clear and credible manner. From a strategic point of view, as responsible-oriented companies place emphasis on understanding the market and adapting to it in order to consolidate the offer according to demand, the absence of such an approach exposes the risk that sustainability actions remain fragmented or insufficiently correlated with market needs.

The conceptual model proposed in this part of the thesis includes a construction based on the importance of education, sustainable marketing communication, consumer trust, attitude towards the circular economy, purchase intention and responsible consumer behaviour, in direct relation to the sustainable promotional techniques of companies oriented towards environmental, economic and social responsibility. Thus, the approach is grounded both in the results of the exploratory analysis carried out through the review of the specialised literature and in the conclusions of the empirical research conducted.

Chapter 5, entitled *Conceptual Model for Developing Marketing Strategy within the Circular Economy*, proposes the integration of the qualitative and quantitative research results into a conceptual model of sustainability-oriented marketing strategy. This chapter represents the central component of the personal contribution developed within the present research, through the proposal of a conceptual model based on the establishment of an appropriate marketing strategy.

The strategic and conceptual model for analysing, designing, implementing and evaluating a marketing strategy adapted to the circular economy system starts from the need to contextualise a coherent approach to the relationship between companies' orientation towards circular aspects, integrated marketing decisions and consumers oriented towards responsibility, against the background of current economic, social and environmental conditions, dynamics and transformations. It uses as a scientific framework the theoretical approaches explored in the first part of the thesis and the quantitative and qualitative results presented in the second part.

The structure of the chapter includes three main sections: the presentation of the conceptual model, the theoretical and practical implications of the research, and the limitations and future research directions. Thus, the first section presents the theoretical and methodological foundations that constitute the basis for constructing the model, as well as the way in which the results of the qualitative and quantitative research, combined with the perspectives of companies and consumers, are integrated into the logic of the proposed model. In this part, the specific components, the relationships between variables and the main mechanisms of influence are also defined, while the applicability of the model within sustainable marketing strategies is analysed. In addition, the contributions generated by the results obtained and by the proposed conceptual model are reflected, with the theoretical implications analysed from the perspective of extending knowledge on the relationship between marketing strategy and the circular economy, and the practical and strategic implications analysed from the perspective of the usefulness of the results for companies oriented towards environmental, economic and social sustainability.

In practical terms, the personal contribution based on exploratory and empirical research is marked by the interdependence between company and consumer, with the results being evaluated and reintegrated into the projection of marketing strategy through the feedback mechanism.

The directions outlined within the chapter therefore facilitate the transition from the interpretation of research results to the design of a conceptual instrument with explanatory and applied value in the current context of the circular economy. Consequently, the model is presented as a construction grounded in a theoretical framework and supported by empirical evidence, which can influence companies' strategic marketing decisions towards a form of communication that is responsible, educational and oriented towards the creation and delivery of value.

The conclusions of the thesis include both the results of the theoretical and empirical approach carried out and scientifically highlight, based on the hypotheses from the specialised literature and the research conducted, the central role of the circular economy in redefining companies' marketing strategies and in influencing responsible consumer behaviour. Thus, the analysis supports the premise that the circular economy represents not only an alternative economic model, but also a reference framework that determines considerable transformations in the way companies design, implement and optimise their marketing strategies. This approach provides a series of unitary premises regarding the relationship between the circular economy, marketing strategy and consumer behaviour, contributing to the development of the theoretical framework and to the foundation of applied directions.

Representative through its selected theme, the research thesis *The Role of the Circular Economy in Marketing Strategy: A Perspective on Consumer Behaviour and Companies' Promotional Practices* constitutes a study scientifically and practically anchored in the current context, combining perspectives in a complex form, defined by the exploratory, methodological and empirical analysis of sustainability in relation to marketing strategy.

The architecture of the research is delimited by three complex parts, namely the theoretical foundation, the empirical research and the conceptual model, complemented by a series of implications, recommendations, limitations and specific directions that are essential for supporting and strengthening the connection between the circular economy and sustainable marketing strategy. In this respect, marketing is positioned as a function with strategic value in supporting the transition process towards circularity, having, in addition to the specific role of communication and promotion, the central role of transforming the sustainable characteristics and advantages of products into value propositions that are relevant in consumers' perception. It also directs favourable attitudes towards the materialisation of consumer behaviour in a responsible direction, appropriate for transparent, coherent and verifiable communication, reducing the gaps between company initiatives and consumer expectations.

Therefore, the thesis indicates the need to evolve from the punctual promotion of sustainability towards the construction of a marketing strategy capable of integrating circularity into the entire experience offered to the market, through contemporary mechanisms of understanding, adaptation, communication and promotion. To this end, the proposed conceptual contribution outlines the trajectory through which companies can transform the principles of the circular economy from a conceptual aspiration into an applicable strategic direction, contributing simultaneously to company performance, global responsibility and the conscious, educated and relevant involvement of consumers in the circular design of a sustainable future.